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COORDINATION, PROGRAMME AND OTHER QUESTIONS: JOINT AND CO-SPONSORED UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME ON HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS/ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME (HIV/AIDS)

Statement submitted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 26 July 1996.

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INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

PLACE DU PETIT-SACONNEX
1211 GENEVA 19 (SWITZERLAND)

TELEPHONE (41.22) 919 41 50 - TELEFAX (41.22) 733 31 41 - E-MAIL postbox@mail.ipu.org
TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS - INTERPARLEMENT GENEVE - TELEX 414217 IPU CH

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GENERAL SEGMENT

(c) Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS)

*Written statement presented by the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION AND UNAIDS

In April 1998, at its 99th Conference in Windhoek, Namibia, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), with technical support from UNAIDS, unanimously adopted a resolution on «Action to Combat HIV/AIDS in View of its Devastating Human, Economic and Social Impact». According to the resolution, a Handbook was to be developed to assist legislators in implementing the *International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights* and in so doing, foster human rights as part of an effective response to HIV/AIDS.

UNAIDS, in consultation with the IPU, has since been in the process of producing a «Handbook for legislators on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights». The Handbook documents the principles in the *International Guidelines*, analyses these principles from the perspective of legislators, identifies the processes that legislators can use in order to implement a particular principle and cites Best Practice examples under each principle demonstrating how some countries have implemented the *Guidelines*.

In the spirit of the resolution, in order to establish a mechanism where lawmakers could thoroughly review and critique the draft Handbook, and where they could provide further national perspective, the IPU Council, meeting in Moscow in September 1998, agreed to sponsor a Parliamentarians' Working Group to work with UNAIDS in finalising the draft Handbook. UNAIDS, in consultation with the IPU, identified countries to participate in the Working Group. They were Botswana, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Philippines, Russian Federation, South Africa, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

* The Inter-Parliamentary Union is the world organisation of parliaments of sovereign States.

All members of the Working Group attended the session held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 24 to 26 February 1999. UNAIDS provided secretarial and technical support to the Working Group.

The objective of the meeting was to thoroughly review the issues in the draft Handbook to ensure that it addresses all relevant issues, that it contains a wide range of Best Practice examples of legislation, policy and programmes adopted by parliamentarians in the area of HIV/AIDS and human rights, and that its proposals are practical and can be implemented by legislators.

The opening statements were made by Mr. Anders Johnsson, Secretary General of the IPU, and Ms Sally Cowal, Director, Department of External Relations, UNAIDS, on behalf of Dr. Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director. Dr. Najma Heptulla, Deputy Chairperson of the Upper House of the Indian Parliament, gave the keynote address on the role of parliamentarians in the context of HIV/AIDS.

These introductory remarks highlighted the roles of the IPU, UNAIDS and parliaments in dealing with HIV/AIDS issues; ways in which lack of human rights protection fuels the epidemic, namely the impact of discrimination on people living with HIV/AIDS, those presumed to be infected, their family and careers, and affects their ability to gain access to care and support; the vulnerability to infection of those whose economic, social and cultural rights are not respected, such as women in some countries; and the difficulty of informing oneself and protecting oneself from becoming infected where civil and political rights are violated, such as freedom of speech and association. It is also difficult for civil society to respond effectively to the epidemic.

Also emphasised was the role of parliamentarians in advancing HIV/AIDS and human rights issues at the national level: as *political leaders*, they can influence public opinion, and can increase public knowledge of HIV/AIDS issues, particularly as they relate to human rights; as *lawmakers*, they vote on legislative acts and participate in legal reform. They are thus critical in ensuring that legislation protects human rights in the context of HIV/AIDS and advances effective prevention and care programmes at the national level; as *advocates* they can mobilise the involvement of government, private sector and the civil society to discharge their societal responsibilities in responding appropriately to the epidemic; and as *resource mobilisers*, in deciding on national budget allocations they can enhance allocations affecting HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support.

The MPs conducted their work in two smaller Working Groups: Working Group 1 considered the sections in the draft Handbook covering «institutional responsibilities and processes» and «promotion of a supportive and enabling environment; Working Group 2 considered «law review, reform and support services.

These Working Groups thoroughly reviewed the whole draft Handbook by discussing their areas of focus page by page, identifying gaps, inconsistencies in the text and proposing amendments. In addition to the specific comments on the content of the draft Handbook, the Working Groups made the following general comments: the Handbook should be made as user-friendly as possible. To this end, it should have checklists highlighting the essential principles applicable in various areas. The Handbook should serve as a reference book, hence its content should be extensive. It should be well footnoted so that parliamentarians

have enough information for further research in the areas they wish to implement at national level.

Best Practice examples are important as they give focus to the principles by offering guidance as to how the principles of the *International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights* can be concretely implemented at the national level. However, in order to avoid over-expectation, there is need to assess the outcomes of the Best Practice examples highlighted in the draft Handbook. Only actual cases, which illustrate impact should be included in the Handbook. Ideas and Best Practice examples should be presented as part of a process rather than as isolated initiatives. Emphasis should be placed on the importance of evaluating Best Practice examples in order to assess their effectiveness and impact. Inclusion of superficial Best Practice examples may undermine the handbook. The Best Practice examples in the draft Handbook should not be confined to the national level but also should include examples at the regional, district and local levels, because in most decentralised systems this is where final policy decisions and legislation are formulated.

All Members of Parliament comments positively remarked on the productivity and organisation of the meeting; the opportunity the meeting provided them to share ideas and network amongst themselves on how to motivate leaders in their countries and constituencies for action on HIV/AIDS, the comprehensiveness and usefulness of the draft Handbook which is under preparation and the close IPU and UNAIDS collaboration which is critical if the Handbook is to be accepted and advanced as a working tool by Parliamentarians. In order to further foster this interaction, a suggestion was made of linking the IPU and UNAIDS Web Sites.

The Handbook will be finalised, edited and published as a joint UNAIDS/IPU document. It is anticipated that the Handbook will be formally launched by IPU and UNAIDS during the 102nd Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union scheduled to take place from10 to 16 October of this year in Berlin.